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SUBJECT: USG-FUNDED DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAMS  
MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Classified By: A/DCM Robert Ford for Reasons 1.4 (d)

¶1. (U) This cable was drafted jointly by Embassy Baghdad and visiting DRL staff from Washington.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: Poloffs and visiting DRL officers conducted an intensive round of field visits to DRL-funded democracy and human rights projects in Iraq from Oct 14-22, touring and meeting with representatives of 17 DRL-funded projects in Erbil, Kirkuk, Sulaimaniya, Basrah, and Baghdad. The projects visited covered a broad range of democracy and human rights objectives. This cable will focus on select programs that support the Iraqi parliament, capacity building for NGOs, media development, human rights education, and support to victims of torture. The field review coincided with the visit to Iraq of Board members from the International Republican Institute (IRI), who indicated prior to departure from Iraq they would support increased program activities in Baghdad and the provinces. End Summary.

Assistance to Parliament  
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¶3. (SBU) From October 14-22, Poloffs and DRL officers visited several regions of Iraq to monitor democracy and human rights programs funded by the DRL. IRI is one of DRL's major democracy grant recipients. IRI's program in Iraq works to enhance government capacity to perform core functions; foster transparency, public dialogue, and responsiveness in the legislative process; strengthen civil society organizations; and encourage movement toward internally democratic, issues-based political organizations. On October 19, poloffs observed IRI training in Baghdad for approximately 15 COR members, including three women. The training, "On Camera Message Strategy," focused on increasing communication skills and outreach to constituents. During a tour of the COR's Research Directorate, established in 2006, the head librarian noted that the creation of the library would not have been possible without support from IRI. Poloffs and RRT Erbil staff also visited the DRL-funded IRI media center in Erbil on October 15. The center provides training to members of the COR and political parties on communications and media outreach; it also produces TV spots and talk shows with Iraqi public figures in cooperation with partner civil society organizations to promote public awareness of key issues. For example, eight Iraqi TV stations aired spots to encourage voter registration six times per day for fifteen days during the voter registration period for the upcoming provincial elections.

Training NGOs  
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¶4. (SBU) The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is also one of DRL's major democracy grant recipients. NDI's program seeks to strengthen democratic political institutions, provide neutral space for political opponents to engage in dialogue and decision-making, promote the participation of

youth and women in the political process, and support the monitoring of elections. In accordance with these goals, NDI is working to improve the capabilities of civic activists and provide political access and skills development to future political and civic leaders. On October 15, emboffs observed a capacity-building training in Erbil for approximately 15 civic activists from Anbar Province. The two-day training focused on strategic planning and on building an NGO network throughout Anbar. NDI continues activities to prepare for provincial council elections, including work with the Election Information NetworQ(EIN), which has trained 20,000 election observers, and other regional civil society networks to prepare for nationwide domestic election monitoring. NDI is also linking partner civil society organizations and activists with the Independent Higher Electoral Commission (IHEC) to help the IHEC and governorate electoral offices (GEOs) better understand citizen needs and prepare for the administration of the elections.

#### Support for the Iraqi Media

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¶5. (SBU) Poloffs and visiting DRL officers met with the program director of a recently launched DRL-funded grant to the International Exchange and Research Board (IREX). IREX supports independent media in Iraq, providing technical training highlighting professionalism and impartiality to journalists. Other activities include voter education and objective media coverage of the provincial elections. IREX is also working with the election commission (IHEC) to produce and disseminate publicoutreach messages in advance of the late-January provincial elections.

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¶6. (SBU) In Baghdad, DRL is also funding the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), whose programs support Iraq's independent media sector by addressing the urgent need for journalists to be trained in unbiased and comprehensive reporting. IWPR has been conducting a special program that focuses on womens issues since 2004, and was recently awarded three additional grants in support of journalist training, safety, and legal representation.

#### Human Rights Education

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¶7. (SBU) In Baghdad and Basrah, Poloffs and DRL officers met with the Iraq Foundation (IF) to review current programming on grassroots human rights training. IF is conducting a human rights education program that assists widows in learning handicraft skills after attending morning classes on basic human rights principles. IF then assists the same women in marketing these handicrafts or in finding jobs that employ their skills, building upon their newly developed sense of self-worth and greater familiarity with their rights. Also addressing human rights needs and education in Iraq is Relief International's (RI) Iraqi Legal Aid Centers (ILAC) program. The ILACs are located in Erbil, Baghdad, Kirkuk, Ramadi, Hilla, Kut, and Ammara, and will continue to improve Iraqis access to grassroots legal assistance as well as rule of law and human rights education.

¶8. (SBU) Poloffs and DRL officers met with staff and participants of the Assisting Marsh Arabs and Refugees (AMAR) International Charitable Foundation in Basrah and Baghdad. With the support of several donors, AMAR manages a large, diverse program in Iraq. AMAR's current DRL project, The Marshland Heritage Project, addresses the Marshland Arabs' history, economic status, geography, and social structure. The project works from three learning centers (middle schools) in Basrah, Dhi-qar, and Maysan, includes lectures and text books that redefine the region and culture as a significant and valuable part of Iraqi society, and introduces basic human rights concepts and their application. All lectures and texts are created by Marshland academics

from Basrah University. Previous texts were supplied by the Ba'athist regime and included nothing on these topics. Additionally, AMAR also informed DRL that local tribal leaders are requesting and using these texts to instruct their people. Emboffs were invited to attend a diwaniya hosted by a local sheikh, who attended the Basrah meeting, during a future visit.

#### Treating Trauma and Torture

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¶9. (SBU) In Sulaimaniya and Kirkuk, poloffs and DRL officers met with three organizations that provide treatment to torture victims: Heartland Alliance (HA), the Berlin Center of Victims of Torture (BZFO), and DePaul University. DRL funding supports HA programs that provide comprehensive services to survivors of torture through the Trauma Rehabilitation and Training Center (TRTC), mediation and prevention of gender-based violence, and advocacy for rights of institutionalized persons in Iraq. Thus far, TRTC has treated 109 out-patients, of which 75 still receive treatment. The majority of patients suffer from extreme depression, hopelessness, thoughts of suicide, and sexual dysfunction.

¶10. (SBU) BZFO, a treatment center that offers psychological counseling and related support, has treated 809 patients since 2005 (55 percent male, 35 percent female, and 10 percent children). The majority of patients treated by BZFO experienced muscular-skeletal trauma and are the primary victims of torture, but the percentage of secondary victims (family members) suffering psychological effects is rapidly increasing. Both TRTC and BZFO were the first of their kind in Iraq and are paving the way for other such organizations to be established. DePaul is concluding its very successful DRL-funded program, the Iraq History Project, which collected more than 7000 testimonies from victims of torture during the Saddam era. DRL also supports DePaul's International Human Rights Law Institute's project to train NGOs in the methodology of collection and analysis of testimony-taking in order to build capacity and sustainability.

#### Mass Graves

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¶11. (SBU) On October 23, DRL officer met with representatives from the US Civilian Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) in Irbid, Jordan, to monitor a training on

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applying DNA to identifying missing persons in mass fatalities. In cooperation with Jordan University for Science and Technology, CRDF is training a core group of Iraqi microbiologists from Baghdad, Kirkuk, Najaf, and Basrah in DNA analysis techniques. This project is one of two funded by DRL to address missing persons and mass grave excavations in Iraq. The other project will be implemented by the International Committee on Missing Persons (ICMP).

#### NDI and IRI Expansion

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¶12. (C) The DRL visit coincided with the visit to Iraq by IRI President Lorne Craner, Executive VP Judy Van Rest, and senior members of the IRI Board of Directors. After meetings with Ambassador Crocker and senior Iraqi officials, IRI local staff indicated the likelihood of the Board supporting an expansion of program activities in Baghdad and the provinces.

IRI is already planning trainings in Baghdad in November and scouting out additional property in the Green Zone. NDI's board recently made a similar determination and will permit the placement of three expatriate staff members in Baghdad full-time. Both NDI and IRI have been headquartered in Erbil for the last two years. NDI's Iraq-based staff have also conveyed their commitment to increasing staff presence and trainings in Baghdad.

Comment

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¶13. (C) We were pleased with the quality and achievements of the DRL programs we monitored during this field visit. Our major focus in the near term will be to ensure robust and effective programs to support upcoming provincial and national elections, including activities to conduct voter education and trainings for political parties, domestic election monitors, and the IHEC. NDI and IRI's expansion of program activities, including more programming in Baghdad, is very positive and timely. We look forward to a possible Board visit from NDI later this fall.

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